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Letter dated 7 August 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to refer to the recent letter addressed to you by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Palestinian Observer Mission dated 31 July 2001. This letter contains a series of misrepresentations and blatant half-truths and I am obliged to endeavour herein to set the record straight.

The Israeli action in the city of Nablus on 31 July 2001 was a preemptive action taken against terrorists who were planning an attack on Israeli civilians. What the Palestinian Observer failed to mention is that the targeted "office building" housed the local office of the Hamas terrorist organization, an organization that is responsible for numerous terror attacks, including the recent massacre at a Tel Aviv nightclub that killed 23 young Israelis. Moreover, the Nablus terrorist cell was in the midst of preparing yet another savage attack. Furthermore, the characterization of these actions as "war crimes" and the contention that these actions demonstrate Israel's disregard for the lives of civilians are utterly baseless. This was a pre-emptive strike taken to protect the lives of innocent civilians, an action which any State would be obligated to take in the face of compelling evidence of an imminent terrorist attack. Moreover, this action would have been unnecessary had the Palestinian leadership been living up to its legal and moral obligations to prevent terrorist attacks on innocent civilians.

Israel is deeply saddened by the deaths of two Palestinian brothers who happened to be nearby when the strike took place. We profoundly regret the practice of terrorist organizations situating themselves in the midst of civilian populations. Israel takes every possible precaution to ensure that its actions to combat terrorism avoid harming civilians and surrounding infrastructure. Nonetheless, it is downright duplicitous for the Palestinian leadership to continue to permit, and indeed to actively assist, terrorist groups to plan attacks on innocent Israeli civilians while condemning Israel for taking pre-emptive measures to prevent those attacks.

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With regard to the incident in Jenin on 29 July 2001, the deaths of the six Palestinians were the result of the premature detonation of explosive devices with which they were working, most likely in preparation for a terrorist attack against Israeli civilians. The Israeli Government had nothing to do with their deaths.

With regard to the Israeli actions atop the Temple Mount, the account presented by the Palestinian Observer is utterly fallacious and riddled with falsehoods. The Temple Mount Faithful, a small Israeli fringe group, has annually attempted to place a cornerstone on the Temple Mount for the past several years. Contrary to the Palestinian account, the Israeli high court has barred the group from entering the Mount, and the Israeli police have actively enforced this decision. In order to further minimize tensions, the cornerstone was prevented from even entering the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. The truck carrying the stone paused only for a few brief seconds outside the gates of the Old City before police instructed it to move. At no time did the group attempt to enter the Temple Mount compound, and the cornerstone itself never even entered the city.

Although in a free society such as Israel's such groups cannot be prevented from demonstrating and exercising their right to free speech and free expression, every precaution was taken to minimize tensions. More significantly, this event was wholly expected, as it happens every year without incident. The Palestinian leadership, however, decided to capitalize on this year's event, declaring in advance a "day of rage" and calling upon its people to defend the Mount, even though the notion that the area was under any kind of attack is utterly preposterous. Whipped into a frenzy by the incitement of their leaders, crowds of Palestinians showered hundreds of Jewish worshippers gathered at the Western Wall below with rocks and large stones, forcing the evacuation of the site on the day when the Jewish people observed the holy day of Tish'a B'av.

Only after several hours of this mayhem, with no effort exerted by the Palestinian leadership to restore calm, did Israeli forces enter the Mount to quell the disturbances. Israel's actions were meant not to protect a marginal religious faction, but the hundreds of Israelis who had peacefully assembled at the Western Wall over the course of the day. Judging by his account of the incident, the Palestinian Observer seems to believe that all Jews who worship at the Western Wall are "Jewish extremists".

It must further be emphasized that, contrary to Palestinian claims, at no time did Israeli forces enter the Al-Aqsa mosque, nor was any attempt made to alter the religious or cultural character of Muslim holy sites.

Israel calls yet again on the Palestinian leadership to abandon this deadly and futile terrorist campaign that will only result in further bloodshed and destruction. Rather than using its political and moral authority to stir up hatred and violence, the Palestinian leadership must act, in accordance with its signed obligations, to halt all violence and terrorism directed against Israel, to end the relentless incitement in the media and by other authoritative figures and to restore an atmosphere of calm conducive to the achievement of a comprehensive political settlement.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under item 178 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative